

ORA ESMARILDA (LOOMIS) RUSSELL

Almost invariably, when I think about OELR I think about OELR's cake-making process: the kitchen table would be covered with bowls (light green); bottles of such wondrous substances as almond extract, concentrated lemon juice, vanilla extract, molasses; tins of saleratus, allspice, ginger, cinnamon, and many other magical items from the Hoosier spice cabinet; eggs, lemons, flour, flour sifter, spoons, cups, baking tins. It strikes me as odd that I do not remember the end products of such culinary efforts, rather, I remember the process of creating hermits, lemon pies, Aunt Maggie's spice cake and other OELR specialties. When I say that I do not remember the end products, I mean that I do not remember tasting the oven-products of OELR as made by OELR nor do I remember smelling them as they baked. What I remember is the smell of the raw materials, in particular the spices from the Hoosier spice cabinet, which is as present--olfactorily--at the moment as the lapsang souchong tea that I am drinking as I write this. OELR's lemon pie was, of course, legendary. It was always included on the menu for the picnics/outings at Lake Ariel. A careful look through HLRP's recipe file is all one need do in order to learn how many of OELR's recipes are Powell family favorites/staples. When I think about OELR, in addition, I also think about tatting, which is defined by *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (1974 Edition, p. 1194) as follows: "n [origin unknown] 1: a delicate handmade lace formed usu. by looping and knotting with a single cotton thread and a small shuttle 2: the act or process of making tatting." OELR loved to tat and in tatting made quite a lot of money. She used money that she made by selling tatting to buy the breakfront that is presently in the living room at The Homestead. I'm sure that examples of her work are owned by a great many families in the Carbondale area. I wonder if OELR ever "signed" her tatting: did she do something that identified her tatting as her hand-work? What are the things that OELR tatted? Handkerchiefs, pillow cases, doilies? Mom must have many things that OELR tatted, but I don't recall having seen them in some time. Did OELR tat using different colored threads? It seems to me that she did, for I have the feeling that I remember seeing floral motifs tatted in multicolored threads. Surely Grandma Russell must have sold pieces of her tatting to women at the church. Cousins Peg and Liz must have some pieces of OELR's tatting that they inherited from Aunt Louise. I imagine that OELR must have sat for hours on end in the wide-armed rocking chair that used to be in the corner in the present Club Room at The Homestead (the chair faced the kitchen) and tatted; while she tatted, I imagine that WAR sat in his green chair and read the paper and dozed and smoked. At present I am thinking about Vermeer and about OELR "la dentelliere." OELR the gardner: Grandma Russell had the most extraordinary collection of cactuses and succulents. The century plant comes to mind invariably when I think about OELR's cacti. I remember when it bloomed. That was a grand occasion and the whole family duly honored the blooming plant. The cactus garden was in OELR's dining room (the present living room). I don't remember any other specific species of plants that OELR had. She must have had many non-cactus plants. Did she have a Chinese evergreen? Did she have a Christmas cactus? Grandma Russell and her extraordinary collection of cactuses; HLRP and her extraordinary collection of African violets; WSP and his extraordinary flower beds on the golf course; DWP and his "orangerie"; SRP and his spider plants: many members of the family seem to have a pronounced plant obsession, if you will. Another botanical wonder that belonged to OELR was the terrarium in the tall, more or less heart-shaped, flat-sided, about 6 inches wide, wide-mouthed bottle about 15 inches high that is presently in the cellar at The Homestead: the terrarium sat on a table in front of the window to OELR's left as she sat in her rocking chair, the very window from which HLRP surveys the world as she sits at the "front desk"/cash register in the Club Room: What table did OELR have in front of that window?

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